

BOARD AND COMMISSION COMMITTEE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

At the Council retreat in January 2013, Council member Ageton proposed that the Council discuss how to enhance the functioning and performance of the City's many boards and commissions (B&Cs). The discussion focused on issues that have arisen with the B&Cs as well as ways in which the Council might become more engaged in and supportive of these bodies. The Council agreed that work in this area could be useful and later appointed a committee composed of Council members Ageton and Plass to gather information from staff and B&C members and return to Council with a report and recommendations for any proposed changes.

As the Committee, we began meeting in February to design a work plan. Based on the Council retreat discussion and our own thinking, three main objectives emerged: (1) enhance Council recruitment, selection, engagement, support and oversight of B&Cs; (2) improve the performance of B&Cs to better serve the Council and community through enhanced group dynamics, capacity building, and adoption of best practices; and (3) strive to assure a rewarding and positive experience for our citizen volunteers who serve on B&Cs.

In developing these objectives, we identified several main areas of focus to pursue in gathering information from City staff involved in working with B&Cs, as well as from current and former B&C members. These areas of focus included: (1) recruitment; (2) application and selection processes; (3) orientation, both general and Board specific; (4) ongoing training and capacity building; (5) Council interaction with B&Cs; (6) Council oversight role; (7) staff support of B&Cs and (8) experience of B&C volunteers.

DATA GATHERING EFFORT

We began our work by acknowledging that among the twenty main City Boards and Commissions (see Attachment A for the list), there is great variety in terms of origins, structure, and responsibilities. Some B&Cs are defined in the City Charter (e.g., the Library Commission and Open Space Board of Trustees), others have their structure and purpose defined by state law (e.g., Boulder Housing Partners and Boulder Urban Renewal Authority) and still others have been created by prior City councils through legislation (e.g., Transportation Advisory Board and Water Resources Advisory Board). Certain of the B&Cs have quasi-judicial authority (e.g., Human Relations Commission and Landmarks) while the primary purpose of others is to provide advice to council (e.g., Arts Commission and Environmental Advisory Board). The Committee's data collection efforts were tailored to take into account these varying roles and responsibilities.

The basic method of data collection we selected was the personal interview, believing it would provide the best opportunity to gain detailed information about the areas of focus. Given the number and variety of B&Cs, however, we tried to choose enough different B&Cs to provide reasonable coverage recognizing that it would be too time consuming to talk with both staff and B&C members from all twenty boards. For the B&C input, we generally chose the chair, either current or just past. We also sought interviews with the staff supporting the B&Cs we selected to interview.

For each individual interviewed, we provided a general introduction to the effort and asked them to consider three basic questions:

- What experiences have you had with your B and/or C, if any, that suggest a need for support, training or some other action to help the B and/or C function/perform more successfully?
- Have you or your staff taken any specific actions in support of your B/C that you found particularly helpful or effective? If yes, please describe. This may include efforts to support the entire B/C, specific members or your department employees who staff the B/C.
- What actions could the Council take that would enhance/improve the performance and functioning of the B/Cs? Your suggestions are welcome both for your department B/C as well as all City B/Cs.

These questions were used as a starting point in the interviews. The interviews were far ranging and more conversational than a formal, structured process. We allowed the interviewees to introduce new topics and often just listened to the issues and concerns that were raised.

For those staff and B&C members we did not select for an interview, we sent email requests asking the same basic questions posed to those interviewed in person.

In total, we interviewed 17 people: 4 B&C members and 8 support staff in addition to the City Attorney, Deputy City Attorney and the City Clerk with her two support staff. We received email responses from 9 B&C members and 8 support staff. The City Manager was kept informed of our efforts with an initial meeting and then an update when we had finished all interviews.

Additional data collection included reviewing past materials and Council discussions of B&C issues, as well as several Charter sections referring to specific B&Cs along with Charter Section 130 which refers to Advisory Commissions.

WHAT WE HEARD

This section provides a brief summary of the comments we heard, organized by the main areas of focus or by topics, which we heard from enough individuals to highlight. There is also a Miscellaneous section to capture some unique comments we thought worth sharing.

A. Recruitment

1. How do we get a larger pool of applicants? Better utilize Channel 8; social media.
2. Consider Channel 8 spots on B&Cs featuring montage of board members in promotional piece.
3. Make better use of the Communications Department. Outreach feels “blah” right now.
4. Rotate venue of B&C meetings to attempt to engage different segments of our community.

5. Reconsider the 5 year term length. Is this an impediment to a larger applicant pool?
6. Let's take a chance and appoint people outside of the usual cast of characters.
7. B&C members need to better reflect the whole community.
8. Improvements to B&C Database—more attractive web page, ease of accessing/filling out applications (plus other benefits) could help recruitment.
9. Increase advertising budget for B&C recruitment.

B. Application and Selection Processes

1. Consider creating job description; core competencies called out (consider card sort).
2. City Council (CC) needs to consider emotional intelligence in selection process as well as substantive knowledge.
3. CC needs to consider whether applicant represents the community as a whole and has good interpersonal skills and weight that more than any particular technical expertise.
4. If lack good candidates, it is sound policy to reopen the position.
5. Ask particular board what the qualities are for a good board member.
6. Consider holding interviews on a Saturday.
7. Consider changing interview format.

C. Orientation

1. New Board Member 101—particularly for those with no board experience.
2. Biggest challenge—getting old board members to attend.
3. New appointees—lucky to get half of them to attend orientation.

4. Emphasize roles and responsibilities training in orientation.
5. Consider the potential of online orientation.
6. Orientation could also consist of a video shown at a regular board meeting to assure better attendance.
7. Make materials more uniform for orientation.
8. Tap into CML for ideas regarding B&C training. They have many resources.
9. Prepare video that features council members to be shown at orientation.
10. Rework 2004 Guiding Principles re: B&C.
11. Distribute CAO Advice to Library Commission re: permitted communications to all boards.
12. Reconsider breadth of orientation—perhaps too siloed.
13. Have a “Lessons Learned” panel of former B&C members who have recently served to answer questions.
14. More of a focus on practical and organizational issues, including procedure.
15. Quasi judicial boards need specific training.
16. Create a “Policies and Procedures” manual for each B&C.
17. Create individualized orientation handout for each board.

D. Roles/Responsibilities

1. Distribute CC Reference Notebook to all B&Cs to facilitate better grasp of city wide goals and priorities.
2. Address the role of a board member as a decision-maker, rather than an advocate for a particular point of view or interest group.
3. Clarify that B&C and staff do not always have the same perspective.
4. Explain role of staff supporting the board.
5. Reinforce that board member is not another staff member.

6. Differentiate particular board role from other boards when there is overlap.
7. Emphasize criteria-based decision-making. (e.g. site review standards for Planning Board).
8. Make it clear that CC sets policy, not the boards.
9. Clearer direction from CC would be helpful.
10. "Decorum Guidelines" would be helpful for meeting procedure.

E. Ongoing Training/Capacity Building/Group Dynamics

1. Annual retreats are very helpful, focused not just on substance, but capacity building.
2. Agenda meetings are important.
3. Use of outside facilitator can be valuable.
4. Encourage out-of-meeting board opportunities (e.g., bike tours, field trips, etc.).
5. Periodic meeting of board chairs.
6. Use debrief at end of each meeting to get meeting management issues out on the table.
7. How the board chair is selected is important. Prioritize skill set over seniority. Culture of boards varies as to selection.
8. Specialized training for the board chair can be helpful.
9. Training sessions must include staff, as well as the board members.
10. Newly elected chair should reach out to all board members.
11. Some B&Cs have a budget for professional development and attending conferences and workshops, while others do not.

F. Council/B&C Interactions

1. CC Members—Go to B&C in person to offer thanks for service. Divvy up responsibilities.
2. CC Members—attend B&C meetings, or even better, dinner beforehand. Just make sure to give a heads-up that you will be attending.
3. Better response to B&C letters during CC retreat. Make sure to invite appropriate B&C members to relevant CC sessions.
4. Board chair could sit in on relevant CAC items to have a better understanding of what is expected during the CC meeting.
5. Ask for priorities from board for work plan.
6. CC liaison for B&C? A possibility expressed by multiple people.
7. Schedule joint meeting/SSs on a regular basis, even if not yearly.

G. CC Oversight

1. CC needs to be both more and less involved with the boards. More involved in giving clear direction on policy and less involved in the details of what the boards do.

H. Staff Support of B&C

1. Staff needs to view the board as a resource rather than a rubber stamp.
2. Bring items to board before they are set in stone.
3. Important to manage staff expectations regarding board.
4. Distribute staff work plan to board and commission members.
5. Staff responsibility to close loop on CC retreat results with regard to B&C letter of priorities.
6. On the issue of board member requests of staff for additional research, require a nod of 3 or 5, similar to what CC does.

7. Memos from staff can clearly spell out the role of the board on a particular agenda item.
8. Staff should make an effort to involve all board members through outreach, etc.

I. Miscellaneous

1. All B&Cs do not have the same perks such as catered meals, opportunities to attend conferences, etc.
2. Difference of opinion about types of minutes to present to Council; some B&Cs favor more detailed minutes than the standard form/what does Council want?

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are organized by the main areas of focus with one exception. We heard so many comments about the need to define roles and responsibilities for B&C members that we created a separate set of recommendations for this topic. Please note that the recommendations are both general and specific in nature, not prioritized and intended to suggest areas where more work is needed if the Council wishes to pursue the ideas.

In Attachment B, we organized the individual recommendations by how quickly we believe they could be implemented based upon such factors as budget, staff resources needed, length of discussion to clarify, etc.

A. Clarify B&C Roles and Responsibilities

1. Create job description with core competencies applicable to all B&Cs.
Consider using the Leadership Architect Library Structure¹ already employed by the City to develop this description.
2. Identify specific responsibilities/competencies associated with quasi-judicial B&Cs.
3. Distinguish the role of B&C member from staff and Council (e.g., clarify through training that staff and B&C members may have different perspectives, Council sets policy, not B&Cs, etc.)
4. Address role of board member as decision maker and community representative rather than advocate for a specific interest group or point of view.

¹ The Leadership Architect Library Structure is a system used by the City to assess competencies for selection, job profiling, skill assessment and other matters. One of its uses is to identify qualities and skills desired in particular positions. This is accomplished through an elaborate card sort system. Both of us thought it may have applicability if the Council is interested in developing a job description for B&C members.

5. Distribute Council Reference Manual to all B&C members to better facilitate understanding of City-wide goals and priorities.

B. Recruitment

1. Better utilize Communication Dept., Channel 8 and social media to create more excitement re: B&C messaging, (e.g., create promos featuring B&C members).
2. Consider increasing advertising budget for recruitment.
3. Broaden outreach for B&C applicants by going directly to community groups and other relevant organizations to recruit.

C. Application and Selection Processes

1. Redesign application to include questions about collaborative efforts, problem-solving skills, emotional intelligence and other qualities and experiences tied to the core competencies.
2. Set goal of having application revised and operative on-line for 2015 process; this timing will depend on Council interest and cost to upgrade technology.
3. Consider Saturday interview sessions to accommodate applicants.
4. In selection, focus Council attention on ability of applicant to work effectively in a group setting, not just on substantive qualifications.
5. Make debrief after interview sessions a standard part of process.
6. Prior to interviews, consider having Council members check in with Support Staff Group (see recommendation G1) to gain insight into how the various

B&Cs have been functioning; ask about any special skill sets, personal capabilities or other qualities that staff believes would add value to their B&C.

D. Orientation

1. Consider “New Board Member 101,” especially for those with no prior board experience; this should highlight roles and responsibilities.
2. Require attendance of all board members at orientation session each year or consider conducting orientation during a regular board meeting.
3. Ensure uniformity of materials for orientation and include Communication Memo developed by CAO for Library Commission.
4. Create video featuring Council members/B&C members to show at orientation.
5. Develop a “Lessons Learned” panel of former B&C members to share their experiences.

E. Council and B&C Interaction

1. Schedule joint meetings/study sessions with B&Cs as needed but with coverage of all B&Cs at least once every 3 years.
2. Encourage Council members to attend B&C meetings and consider joining the group for dinner beforehand.
3. Assure response to B&C letters sent to Council for retreat to communicate what discussion and action, if any, the Council took w/regard to the matters raised.

F. Ongoing Training and Capacity Building

1. Make annual retreats part of B&C procedure and focus on capacity building such as conflict resolution, ethical communication and group dynamics, as well as substantive issues.
2. Seek to develop opportunities for all B&C members to attend relevant conferences, workshops and other board development experiences.
3. Institute agenda meetings for all B&Cs.
4. Consider adding debrief at end of meetings to get issues out on the table.
5. Encourage out-of meeting opportunities, e.g., field trips and bike tours to help build group camaraderie.
6. Consider ways to enhance performance of B&C Chairs including selection processes and specialized training.

G. Staff Support of Boards and Commissions

1. Develop a City-wide B&C staff support group to enhance capabilities of staff to address B&C needs, issues and especially capacity building.
2. Distribute staff work plan to B&C members.
3. Encourage staff to engage all B/C members and to view them as a resource rather than a “rubber stamp.”
4. In B&C memos, clarify role of the B/C with regard to the particular agenda item.

5. Develop procedure that requires support of X% of B/C before staff undertakes specific requested research (similar to Council nod of 3 or 5).

H. Council Oversight

1. Develop process for Council when exercising its authority to remove a B/C member; clarify process with B&Cs as it is not clear how this process works in practice (see Charter Section 130).
2. Consider having the Council Board and Commission Committee meet regularly with B&C Support Staff Group to keep current with B&C actions and issues.
3. Discuss how Council can ensure that B&Cs are operating within relevant policy and regulatory frameworks.

I. Miscellaneous

1. Review amenities that each B&C receives, e.g., catered meals, opportunities to attend conferences, etc.; there are significant differences among the B&Cs and no clear rationale as to why some B&Cs have amenities and others do not.
2. Clarify form in which Council wishes to receive B&C minutes; there is an ongoing debate about this among some B&Cs and guidance from Council would be helpful.

NEXT STEPS

We are seeking Council direction with regard to the proposed recommendations and possible additional work on B&C issues. Responses to the following questions will help us determine the level of Council interest in pursuing these matters.

- In general, does Council believe that the proposed recommendations capture B&C issues that are worthy of attention?
- Are there any of the proposed recommendations that Council would not wish to pursue?
- Are there any additional issues the Council wishes to add?
- Does Council wish to prioritize the recommendations?
- If the Council is interested in pursuing any of these recommendations, does the Council wish to appoint a more permanent committee to lead the effort to refine and develop the recommendations of interest?

Attachments: Attachment A – List of City Boards and Commissions

Attachment B – Potential Timing of Implementation for Proposed Recommendations

List of City Boards and Commissions

Arts Commission

Beverages Licensing Authority

Board of Zoning Adjustment

Boulder Design Advisory Board

Boulder Junction Access District – Parking Commission

Boulder Junction Access District – Travel Demand Management Commission

Boulder Urban Renewal Authority

Chautauqua Board

Downtown Management Commission

Environmental Advisory Board

Housing Partners

Human Relations Commission

Landmarks Board

Library Commission

Open Space Board of Trustees

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

Planning Board

Transportation Advisory Board

University Hill Commercial Management Advisory Commission

Water Resources Advisory Board

**Potential Timing of Implementation
for Proposed Recommendations
(by # of recommendation)**

		Short-Term	Medium	Long
A.	Clarify Roles & Responsibilities	#5	#2-#4	#1
B.	Recruitment		#3	#1 and #2
C.	Application & Selection	#5	#3 and #4	#1, #2 and #6
D.	Orientation	#5	#2 and #3	#1 and #4
E.	Council and B&C Interaction	#1-#3		
F.	Ongoing Training & Capacity Building	#3-#5	#1 and #6	#2
F.	Staff Support	#2 and #4	#3 and #5	#1
G.	Council Oversight		#2	#1 and #3
H.	Miscellaneous		#2	#1